A key feature of any business program (like most academic programs) is the ability to put knowledge into action. As a result, the Master of Business Administration’s (MBA) Student Outcomes Assessment Plan emphasizes teamwork, communication, and decision-making. The difficulty with these objectives, however, has always been how to get accurate, direct observations of these “soft skills” in a reasonable manner that benefits students and provides data for the assessment program. With these joint goals in mind, the MBA program has recently started using assessment center technology to put its incoming MBA 210 students through a series of activities where they participate in meetings, give presentations, and respond to written memos. The activities are then filmed and the tapes are rated by trained assessors who provide accurate and reliable data. The results of this assessment are shared with students and graduating students (as part of MBA 279) are re-assessed. This sets up a pre-test/post-test design to assess whether these learning outcomes are being improved.

Based on the first complete cycle of assessment, the faculty realized that communication skills were not showing the desired degree of improvement. To “close the loop” in the assessment process, the curriculum has since been modified with a new communication module being embedded in the program and more presentation practice existing through the MBA degree.

In the recent Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business accreditation, the accrediting agency pointed to the college’s use of the assessment center as a “best practice.” It has also solved a rather difficult problem that many programs face – to get accurate, direct measures of student soft skills that cannot be adequately evaluated through paper-and-pencil means. The college is currently exploring ways to expand its assessment program and to further refine the processes it employs.

The CTM is now a mandatory exam taken on the last day of the senior seminar course, IT 196. The exam is scheduled twice a year, once for fall and once for spring. The department encourages students to prepare for the exam by studying the CTM study guide among themselves. The exam covers nearly all of the department’s courses, which are grouped under the following categories: Quality, Safety, Production, and Management. The sub categories can be broken down and applied to individual courses as well. As a measure to decrease any skewed or unrepresentative results, the professors will never be involved in the review. The test is used for the purposes of students receiving certification and as a diagnostic tool to increase department effectiveness.

Once the results are returned to the university, the IT department compares their student results to the ATMAE average to see what differences there are. Dr. Zhang states that their short-term goal is getting “every sub-category above ATMAE average.” Based on the most recent CTM results, the Fresno State IT department has about the same pass rate as the national average. In areas where Fresno State’s BSIT (Bachelor of Science in Industrial Technology) performed poorly, new practices were instituted.

Due to the high wrong answer rates in “Sampling,” “Reliability,” and “Profitability,” the IT department decided to institute a new statistics course in their own department to better facilitate learning in these areas. Another course area that was submitted for inclusion was “Finance/Accounting,” which also had a high wrong answer rate. Business Law was also added as a requirement and seems to be improving scores. The score for this area was very low in AY 2008-09, and has since improved to only a 16% wrong answer rate. The most recent set of CTM results. Other less measurable but equally important results of closing the loop are improving teaching methods and tracing the categories back to courses by certain instructors. This resulted in a full-time faculty member teaching “Quality” category courses, instead of the previous part-time instructor.

The CTM is a good diagnostic tool for assessing learning outcomes and tangible course requirements within the BSIT major. Because this test is national and objective, it provides comparison benefits and serves as a good progress indicator of department practices. At the time of Dr. Zhang’s report, there has only been one set of CTM results analyzed, thus no reporting on tangible improvements can be made. However, Dr. Zhang stated that it could take two to three years to fully implement the new practices and establish measurable changes.

http://www.csufresno.edu/OIE